

U.S. takes aim at mail-order target

By Roger Boye

Bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., have begun to crack down on a mail-order company that, they say, has ripped off thousands of novice coin collectors during the last 18 months.

The company—known as the National Monetary Center [NMC], as well as by other names—has run misleading advertisements in dozens of newspapers and magazines, charging exorbitant prices for common-date coins. United States Mint Director Donna Pope wants the government to prosecute.

"NMC has engaged in a continuous, deliberate pattern of distortion and hyperbole, offering U.S. silver coins for sale under false pretenses," she wrote in a letter to the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia.

For example, the latest NMC advertisement promotes the sale of "the last of original, U.S. government Kennedy silver halves" dated 1964 at \$17.95 a coin. Such half dollars are available from almost any coin dealer for \$5 or less.

In her letter, which was excerpted in *Numismatic News*, Mrs. Pope said she knows of

at least 30 deceptive advertisements appearing multiple times in dozens of different publications. The firm received more than 104,000 orders at one of its Washington postal boxes during a 19-week period earlier this year, she added.

"This large-scale operation belies the content of the advertisements, which emphasize the alleged scarcity of the silver coins being offered," she wrote.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Postal Service stopped delivery of mail to the firm last month after filing a complaint that accuses the company of 12 misrepresentations in another of its ads, this one for Morgan silver dollars. Among other things the ad wrongly stated that Morgan dollars are extremely scarce and that the coins offered for sale are part of a recently discovered hoard previously unavailable to the public.

- After months of squabbling, Congress has passed—and President Reagan has signed—a bill authorizing production of official government coins to commemorate the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

The U.S. Mint will produce two types of silver dollars [one dated 1983, the other 1984] and one type of \$10 gold piece dated 1984, in part to raise money for the Olympics. Each dollar will contain .77 of an ounce of silver, and the \$10-face-value coin will contain .48 of an ounce of gold.

Prices, ordering instructions and coin designs will be released in 1983 or 1984.